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Canada

Speech for the
Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada,
Vic Toews, Q.C.
Conference of Western Attorneys General
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Introduction

Thank you, Attorney General [Mark] Shurtleff, for your kind introduction.

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I am very pleased to bring greetings to your annual meeting. I hope your sessions so far have been productive and informative, and that you have had the chance to enjoy the many natural wonders of Anchorage and the surrounding area—truly an awe-inspiring setting.

I have long supported the Conference of Western Attorneys General, and I have also attended many of your past meetings, so I recognize the value of your organization in promoting dialogue on legal issues, both within and between your jurisdictions.

I also know how important it is for both Canada and the United States to cooperate on issues that affect us all. I believe that we are a shining example of neighbouring countries that have thrived thanks to our shared spirit of international cooperation.

Over the past few days, you have been discussing issues ranging from disaster preparedness and public health to energy resources and youth at risk. These are issues that know no borders, and I am sure you agree with me that we can best deal with them by sharing resources and best practices.

The Importance of Partnerships

An example of that type of collaboration is the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America. I am proud that our countries, along with Mexico, are implementing this partnership, and working on an action plan to collaborate in areas like traveller and cargo security, law enforcement cooperation, bioprotection, transportation and the environment.

When our Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, met with President Bush and former President Fox in Cancun last March, they reaffirmed their commitment to the partnership and to enhancing the security, prosperity, and quality of life of North Americans.

In our most recent budget, the Government of Canada backed up its commitment to the partnership with additional funding to protect Canadians, to secure our borders, and to increase our preparedness to address public health threats.

This includes funding to implement a border strategy to promote the movement of low-risk trade and travellers within North America while protecting Canadians from security threats.

The smooth and efficient flow of goods and people across the Canada-U.S. border is critical. We must continue to make investments to improve it.

At the same time, this must be balanced with real security concerns, which have their own effects on trade and tourism. Canadians want a border that is closed to the criminal elements—gangs, guns, drugs, human trafficking and terrorism—but open to legitimate travel as well as the trade of goods and services.

We are doing this, and will continue to do so, by working with the U.S. government t hrough the Security and Prosperity Partnership and other platforms for collaboration.

I believe we can continue to work together successfully to protect our borders while keeping them open to trade and travel.

Law Enforcement and Public Security

Canadian law enforcement officials are increasingly concerned about crime at our borders. The Government of Canada is committed to working with international law enforcement agencies, our municipal and provincial police forces across Canada, and other authorities to fight crime.

We are also committed to supporting the brave men and women of our national police force, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Today's RCMP officers must tackle a wide range of challenges, such as urban crime, cyber crime, organized crime, counterfeit goods, money laundering, and terrorism. And the Government of Canada is proud to help provide the tools and support the RCMP needs to do its work.

In the recent budget, we committed funds to begin recruiting and training up to 1,000 RCMP personnel and to hire additional federal prosecutors over the next two years. This will help target critical issues such as drugs and border security.

We also committed funds that will support specific initiatives, such as:

- fighting money laundering and terrorism;
- integrating enforcement teams to fight currency counterfeiting;
- dealing with emergencies; and
- preventing youth crime, especially as it relates to guns, gangs, and drugs.

The RCMP, along with the Canada Border Services Agency, work closely with other federal departments, U.S. and international law enforcement partners to protect the integrity of Canada's borders and marine ports.

One example of our partnership is the establishment of joint border enforcement teams comprised of law enforcement and customs officials from both countries. These Integrated Border Enforcement Teams—or IBETs for short—address potential terrorist and criminal activity between points of entry along our shared border.

The IBETs, which operate in all regions, on land and sea, along the Canada-U.S. border, have evolved into a major enforcement success and have effectively disrupted smuggling rings and confiscated illegal drugs, weapons, liquor, tobacco, and vehicles, and made numerous arrests.

In addition, the high-level of security and law enforcement cooperation during the Super Bowl week held in Detroit-Windsor in February 2006 has yielded important benefits.

As well, to enhance cross-border law enforcement and intelligence cooperation, our two nations have established a Cross-Border Crime Forum. Through the forum, we work on technical communication issues and standardized models on dealing with national security threats and organized crime groups.

Because of such activities, both of our countries are better able to detect and prevent criminal activities that could pose a serious threat to national and international security.

As long as smuggling of illegal narcotics, weapons, and people in both directions across our border is an issue, we will remain diligent in assisting each other in combating crime. Deterring and prosecuting such crimes will continue to be a priority for our governments.

Canada's Justice Agenda

Along with protecting our borders, Canada has an obligation to protect its residents from crime on the domestic front.

I mentioned earlier that I have been a long-time supporter and attendee to your annual meetings. And I am proud to represent the Government of Canada during this visit in my role as Minister of Justice and Attorney General for Canada.

In that role, I am working closely with my colleague, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Stockwell Day, to tackle crime—one of the five key priorities of our new government.

To this end, our Government has been pursuing a number of aggressive reforms. Thi s spring, we introduced five new bills that will help clean up our streets and restore safety to our communities.

We proposed reforms to our laws on conditional sentencing, so people who commit serious and violent crime will serve their time behind bars—not at home or in the community.

We introduced our Mandatory Minimum Penalties Bill to send a clear message that using guns to commit crimes will not be tolerated.

Our Government has moved to strengthen our National DNA Data Bank legislation to help our police identify the guilty and exonerate the innocent.

We have also introduced new legislation that deals more seriously with street racing, a reckless and dangerous act that kills all too often.

And finally, we introduced legislative proposals that would raise the age at which youth can consent to sexual activity from 14 to 16 years. This legislation targets those who sexually prey upon some of society's most vulnerable individuals.

It's no secret that drug use is growing in both our countries, and the problem of crystal meth is particularly acute in smaller centres and rural communities. I am aware that you held a session yesterday on the issue of methamphetamine, and that this has also been the topic of a previous CWAG summit.

I applaud the hard work you have already done on this issue. The information you've gathered and the decisions you've made will inform our development of a new Canadian national drug strategy.

Conclusion

As Canada's Minister of Justice, I hope to continue to work with you to find lasting solutions to the

issues that affect us all.

International cooperation—that is the key. By working together, we become stronger, and are better equipped to create the safe, secure, and peaceful world we all aspire to build.

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I hope that the rest of your conference is productive and inspiring.

Thank you.

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